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**National Basketball Association fandom in China:**

**A comparative analysis of Fan Behaviors, Fan Motivation, and Team Identification**

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**National Basketball Association fandom in China:**  
**A comparative analysis of Fan Behaviors, Fan Motivation, and Team Identification**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **National Basketball Association Fandom in China: A Comparative Analysis of Fan Behaviors, Fan Motivation, and Team Identification**

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This study examines NBA fandom in China and the U.S. in terms of fan behavior, fan motivations, and team identification. Two hypotheses and three research questions are proposed to examine the relationship among sport fandom, team identification, and sport consumption on social, and how fan motivations differ across two nations. One Chinese sample and one American sample are collected to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. Results from both studies revealed several differences.

Demographic analyses showed gender difference in differentiating fandom and team identification in both of the two nations. Further intercultural research input is called for into this area.

Keywords: fandom, team identification, fan motivation, social media, culture

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

With the emergence of social media, the ways people communicate and engage with brands or businesses have profoundly changed. Furthermore, with the expansion and development of the global economy, sports as a cultural pattern is not limited to several societies, but have grown to a cross-cultural level shared by fans from all over the world. Therefore, sport organizations cannot only reach out to a domestic audience but also “talk” to followers or fans around the world. In terms of social media and sports, many teams and individual players have begun to engage with international followers via social media. By doing so, they are allowed to release news directly to the public without being controlled by traditional media gatekeepers. Simultaneously, teams and athletes can expect to build a parasocial relationship by consistently discussing personal information with followers (Sanderson, 2011).

Despite a high volume of analyses of sports fandom, researchers are primarily focused on sports in the United States rather than examining a global landscape. Though some researchers have extended their studies to other countries outside of North America, such as the United Kingdom (Wann et al., 2014), Greece (Theodorakis & Wann, 2008), and Australia (Melnick & Wann, 2011), “there is still little literature examining sport fandom across multiple cultural contexts” (Theodorakis & Wann, 2008, p. 356). To partially fill this void, the present study investigated sports fandom in China and the United States regarding sport fandom, fan motivations, and team identification.

This study will primarily provide a comparative analysis of NBA fandom in China and the United States. The NBA was selected for this study due to popularity in both the United States and China in comparison to other professional associations such as the NFL and the MLB. Judging from the followers and engagement of the NBA's account on the largest Chinese social media platform, Weibo, it is apparent that the NBA has been consistently engaging with fans in China. For instance, to date, the NBA account has more than 32 million followers on Weibo and 115,371 posts in total. The average daily engagement rate is also approximately 450 comments per post. Furthermore, the NBA has prioritized expanding their fan base globally by embracing digital streaming capabilities through their NBA League Pass International offering (AFP, 2016). According to *Forbes*, China is the NBA's largest international fan base, and the NBA has heavily invested in nurturing its relationship with Chinese audiences by playing games in China and striking its largest digital partnership with China's leading internet service provider, Tencent, to broadcast live NBA content (Heitner, 2015). As a result, examining NBA fandom in China would be quite beneficial in exploring the effect of cultural differences on mediated sport consumption, fan motivations, and team identification.

### **Purpose**

This study intended to examine fans' sports consumption via social media and their level of fandom, team identification, and fan motivation across two different cultural environments. First, this study will determine which demographic factors are affecting fan's scores of fandom and team identification. Second, whether fandom and team

identification are significant predictors of social sport consumption has also been discussed. Further, this study explores whether there are significant differences in fan motivations between American and Chinese fans.

The contribution of this study is to provide guidance for marketers, by finding more effective ways to target NBA fans in both China and the United States. As China is such a huge market for sport marketing, findings from this study will be beneficial for NBA as well as other sport organizations to expand the oversea market by curating customized messaging and marketing strategies.

## **Overview of Chapters**

The first chapter of this study briefly describes the importance of social media in sport consumption and the background of researching fandom in different nations. The first chapter also illustrates that the purpose of this study is to investigate how social media affect fandom, team identification in China and the U.S. as well as research on how fans are motivated differently in these two nations. The second chapter provides a review of previous literature primarily in the four parts of fandom, team identification, fan motivation, and sport consumption via social media. The literature provides important findings leading toward the variables in this study. The third chapter explains main methodological purposes in this study. Three major variables including fandom, team identification, and fan motivation will be used in this study. In particular, to examine fan motivations, 6 subscales (the quality of the game, escape, social, boredom avoidance, entertainment, sport atmosphere) will be included to observe differences between the Chinese and the U.S. sample. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis for the

Chinese and the U.S. sample as well as a comparison analysis. Finally, the fifth chapter offers a discussion regarding how the results generated from this study relate to previous studies of fandom, team identification, and NBA research in China. Additionally, the chapter briefly discusses the implications for sport marketing and management professionals. Limitations of the study and future research recommendations are also offered while concluding this study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review begins with a discussion of sport fandom as a concept and how researchers are measuring it. The second section extends sport fandom to team identification. The third focuses on sport motivation and explaining why people are motivated to consume sports on media. In particular, sport consumption on social media is also discussed. The last part highlights the importance of conducting a cross-national analysis of sport fandom between China and the United States. In this study, the National Basketball Association (NBA) is selected as an example to demonstrate sport fandom in different cultural settings.

### **Sport Fan Identity**

Fan, is formally defined as “an individual who is enthusiastic and loyal admirer of an interest” (Reysen et al., 2010). According to social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) theories, people define themselves and interact with others based on the groups to which they belong. “Many individuals attend sporting activities and regard themselves as sports fans, but there are obvious differences between participating in sports and merely being a sport fan” (Otteson, Gabe, 2014, p. 5). In terms of sport fan characteristics, Reysen and Branscombe (2010) examined the similarities and differences between fans and non-sport fans. They found that both of them are similar in many aspects, such as group identity. For example, they said that all fans, regardless of interests, have to go through “a process of identity formation” (p.176). However, sport fans have demonstrated unique

characteristics in many aspects, including emotions, behavior, and cognitions (Raney, 2009).

Sport fandom is related to many factors, including fan behaviors (e.g. sport consumption), socialization into the sport fan role, and identification with the social role of sport fan as well as their favorite teams. In measuring sport fandom and examining the relationship between fandom and other demographic factors, Wann's Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ) has been widely used (Wann, et al., 2008; Reysen & Branscombe, 2010; Wann, Waddill, Dunham, 2004; Melnick, Merrill & Wann, 2004). Previous research has indicated a relationship between gender difference and sport fandom in which males were more likely to be involved in sport activities than females (Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004; Wann & Pierce, 2005). Wann (1998) also examined the relationship between fandom and alcohol use among college students in which no significant relationships were found. Despite studies about sport fandom, there is still a lack of information about whether the fandom and gender differences exist in other nations and in consumptions of different sports (Tobar, 2006).

### **Team identification**

Sport fandom, does not singularly describe a fan's connection with a team, but also refers to a fan's connection with other members in this group (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Fink, Trail and Anderson (2002) found that "fans high in team identification are more likely to attend games, pay more for tickets, spend more money on team merchandise, and stay loyal to the team during periods of poor performance" (p.195). Thus, it is important to explore the relationship between team identification and

sport fandom. In particular, identification is defined as “an orientation of the self in regard to other objects including a person or group that results in feelings or sentiments of close attachment” (Trail et al., 2000, pp. 165-166). Half a century ago, Kagan (1956) claimed that one of the results of team identification is that individuals might react to events happened to the team as if they happened to themselves. Then, Sutton (1997) defined team identification as “the personal commitment and emotional involvement customers have with a sport team” (Sutton et al., 1997, p. 15).

No matter how strong a person identifies with a team, determining the causes and antecedents of team identification is difficult. Wann, Tucker and Schrader (1996) conducted empirical studies to explore the potential antecedents or factors to team identification. They found that the reasons of team identification can be divided into three parts: psychological, environmental, and team-related causes (Kolbe & James, 2000; Wann, Tucker & Schrader, 1996). Specifically, in terms of psychological antecedents, scholars determined that fans possess “the need for belonging or affiliation” (Donavan, Carlson, Zimmerman, 2005; Gwinner & Swanson, 2003; James, Kolbe, & Trail, 2002; Pritchard, Stinson, & Patton, 2010) and “the need for distinctiveness” (Dimmock & Gucciardi, 2008; Hyatt & Andrijiw, 2008). Environmental causes refer to one’s surroundings, including the fan’s socialization into the team culture, the presence of rivals, and the physical proximity to the team or the stadium (Swyers, 2005; Underwood, Bond, & Baer, 2001). For the team-related cause, it focuses on the similarity that the fans perceive with the team, players, and their history.



In terms of the benefits and results of team identification, Wann et al. (2011) hypothesized a team identification-psychological model which claims that a positive correlation exists between team identification and social psychological health because identification would help build social connections which, in turn, facilitate well-being (Wann, 2006). According to Branscombe and Wann (1991), “strong identification with a specific sports team provides a buffer from feelings of depression and alienation, and at the same time, fosters feelings of belongingness and self-worth” (p. 115). As a consequence, sport team identification has become a large social structure different from traditional family-based or community-based attachment (Branscombe & Wann, 1991). Furthermore, Wann and Polk (2007) then tested the team identification-psychological model in a study and proved that sport team identification is positively related to the trustworthiness of others. Knowing the causes and benefits of team identification is necessary for analyzing how it affects fans’ behavior.

Researchers are also very interested in team identification because it is a strong predictor of sport consumption (Fink et al., 2002). Team identification not only affects fan’s responses to the game, but also is a key factor to differentiate the level of an individual’s sport fandom and influence fan’s behavior (Wann, Dimmock, Grove, 2003). With respect to the consequences of team identification, Wann (2006) concluded that highly identified fans will respond more intense to their team’s performances and actions than other less identified persons. Aside from that, Wann (2006) also suggested most of the studies of sport team identification were focused on the impact of identification on fans behaviors, especially in the fields of sport marketing and management. In particular,

he noted that there are three major parts in sport consumptions: game, team-related, and sponsorship. Game consumption involves attending “sporting events” and following sport or teams on different media platforms, such as television, radio, newspaper and the internet. Team-related consumption is primarily about purchasing “team-related products and appeal”. Lastly, sponsorship concerns “fans’ perceptions and patronage of sponsor’ products” (p. 355). Numerous studies (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Greenwood, 2001; Hill & Green, 2000; Mahony, et al., 2002) found that levels of team identification remain a significant factor in affecting sport consumption. Fisher (1998) suggested that team identification also influences fans’ indirect consumption via the media, which means more identified fans, would be more likely to follow their teams through radio, newspaper, television or the internet. In Kwon and Armstrong’s (2002) study, regression analyses revealed that team identification is “the only significant antecedent to impulse buying of sport team licensed merchandise” and it also “influenced the amount of money spent on impulsive sport purchases.” (p. 151).

Having such awareness could be very beneficial for making effective marketing strategies to target fans. For instance, knowing how identification impacts the behavior of fans like sport consumption and spectator aggression would be useful for sport marketing and management.

Because the responses of sport fans are highly related to their level of identification with and commitment to their team, it is of high importance to measure identification accurately, especially to sport managers and marketers (Wann & Perce, 2003). Two major scales, the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS, Wann &

Branscombe 1993) and the Psychological Commitment to Team Scale (PCT, Mahony, Madrigal, & Howard, 2000) have been widely used in team identification-related studies. For these two scales, Wann and Peirce (2003) have tested that they are “highly correlated and both predicted fan behaviors” (p.365). The SSIS scale has been successfully tested in various countries, such as Greece (Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Melnick, & Wann, 2011; Parry, Jones, & Wann, 2014) the United Kingdom, and Australia. Wann and Sarmento (2010) stated that the “Portuguese version was a reliable and valid instrument for use by researcher in assessing sport team identification” (p. 67).

### **Sport Fan Motivations**

After researchers established how to properly measure sport fandom, they began to explore the underlying motivations for one’s level of fan identity. “Understanding the why of behavior has been a consistent goal of psychology research” (Clancy et al., 2016, p.232). Besides, previous studies have confirmed a positive relationship exists between sports fan motivation and team identification (Fink, Trail & Anderson, 2002; Hsu, 2003). The motivation of consuming sports is always complicated by nature but of great importance and utility in understanding why people become fans of sports and the cause of fandom behavior (Roberts, Treasure, Conroy, 2007). Motivation research in the area of sport psychology has been an “ever-present and robust topic” despite its conceptualization and measurement challenges (Lindahl, Stenling, Lindwall, & Colliander, 2015, p. 77). Therefore, there is a widespread interest in this topic from various perspectives and disciplines, such as education and psychology (Wann, 1995).

Despite many previous studies on sport motivations, “motivation and its links to sport behavior remain less well understood than some other psychological constructs for several reasons” (Clancy et al., 2016, p. 233). One of the reasons is that “sport motivation results from the interaction of many diverse factors”, including internal motives and external events (Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004). Moreover, “there is a plethora of theories on this topic, ranging from the early ‘grand’ theories that sought to unify all actions within a single framework (e.g., Drive Theory, Hull, 1943) to the more contemporary accounts that focus on particular behavioral phenomena” (Clancy et al., 2016, p. 233). According to a research conducted by Clancy (2016), Self-Determination Theory and Achievement Goal Theory were the dominant motivational theories adopted by sport motivation related studies. For example, in the view of self-determination theory, physical activity contributes to both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). For the intrinsic perspective, Ryan claims that people engage in physical activities because of the “inherent pleasures and satisfactions it provides” (Ryan & Frederick, 1997, p. 529). People are intrinsically motivated because they find sport activities interesting, challenging, and enjoyable (Frederick & Ryan, 1995). Engaging in activities is a way to help train one’s skills and capacities of an organism, resulting in higher competence and adaptive advantages in the physical world (Deci & Ryan, 1985). With respect to the extrinsic motives, it means a person could get external rewards from an activity while enjoying the exercise or activity (Ryan, William, Patrick, Deci, 2009).

Despite a lot of research about sport fan motivations, most can be summarized into “one of eight types: eustress, self-esteem benefits, escape from everyday life,

entertainment, economic factors, aesthetic qualities, group affiliation, and family needs” (Wann et al., 2008, p. 6). Specifically, eustress is one of the most commonly used motivations among all the studies regarding fan motivations (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Elias & Dunning, 1970; Sloan, 1989; Wenner & Ganrz, 1989). Zuckerman (1979) suggested that sports are enjoyable to some fans because their senses can be aroused during the games. In terms of self-esteem, it refers to the fact that fans are often motivated because they can gain a feeling of achievement when their team won the game (Cialdini et al., 1976). Branscombe & Wann (1991) said that this benefit could also be associated with the consequences from feelings of identification and belonging. In regards to escape, fans seek an outlet that allows them to get away from their “humdrum daily routines” when they are involved in sports (Smith, 1988, p.58). Part of the reasons that people choose sport to entertain themselves is because sport spectating has fewer requirements on specific skills compared to other activities such as participating in sport games (Zillmann et al., 1989). Another motive is economic, which means fans expected to get financial profits from sports (Guttmann, 1986). As for the aesthetic motive, it means some fans are motivated because of the beauty and aesthetic value of the sport events. Moreover, fans can also “be motivated by affiliation needs” (Wann, 1995, p. 378). To avoid being alienated by their group, people choose sport as a way to socialize with other members in the community (Guttmann, 1986). This motive is very similar to the final motive, family needs. To some people, spectating sports is a good way to spend quality time with families (Gantz, 1981; Guttmann, 1986).

It is expected that different motives will have a different effect on fan's level of fandom and team identification. Researchers have been using different scales to explore the relationship between demographic variables and those various motives mentioned above (Bilyeu & Wann, 2002). Many researchers such as Wann (1995) and Wilson (1999) have not found an obvious relationship between age and fan motivations. Gender, on the contrary, was proved to be a significant differentiator in measuring fan motivations (Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999; Bilyeu, & Wann, 2000). "Females reported higher levels of family motivation than males, while males reported higher levels of eustress, self-esteem, and aesthetic motivation" (Bilyeu & Wann, 2002, p.93).

With respect to the measurement of fan motivations, most of the studies are centered on introducing various types of sports fan motives in understanding fan behaviors (Wann, 1995; Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001; Bilyeu & Wann, 2002; Mahony et al, 2002; Trail & James, 2001; Wann & Waddill, 2003). According to the literature, it is reasonable to divide fan motivations into two categories: psychological motives (e.g. aesthetics and entertainment) and social motives (e.g. social, and economic). In terms of social motives, Armstrong (2002) examined fan motivations among African-Americans and found that cultural affiliation plays a significant role in predicting sport consumption. Other studies found that gender is also a strong predictor regarding social factors which indicated that females are more likely to be motivated for sport events than males (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Moreover, psychological motives, such as aesthetics, entertainment, self-esteem, escape, and eustress, have also been widely analyzed by researchers in predicting fan behaviors. In particular, aesthetics is one of the most

significant motives for sport consumption according to studies conducted by Trail and James (2001). Similarly, escape, entertainment, self-esteem would also be worth exploring as driving factors for people to watch or attend sports activities. Despite a lot of studies on fan motivations, research on this topic in multicultural settings is still limited. Thus, based on previous studies, this study will extend the examination on how fans are motivated by various motives across different nations.

### **Mediated sport consumption**

Mediated sport consumption is regarded as a phenomenon and behavioral results of sport fandom and team identification. According to a study conducted by Gau et al (2009), “consumers with a high level of team identification were more likely to be motivated, perceived better service quality and consumed more media and merchandize products” (p. 76). Therefore, it is important to discuss fans’ levels of mediated sport consumption to further examine fans’ motives in consuming media and how media consumption affects fandom in general.

“The importance of mediated sports in contemporary global society is undeniable” (Raney, 2006, p.313). Being a sport participator and a sport spectator have internal connections, however, the differences between them are also very obvious (Otteson, Gabe, 2014). To explore how sport audiences behave as a result of consuming sport-related programming, it is necessary to examine the attributes of other media audiences and apply in the sport environment. The uses and gratifications theory (Cantril, 1942) also explains that people consume certain media content, because they have social and

psychological needs. With this in mind, it is not surprising to see people “turn to sports programming to meet the various needs they experience” (Raney, 2006, p. 340).

According to Raney (2006), people choose to view and watch sports programming because of three major reasons: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral needs. First, Raney suggested that people watch sports games “because of the emotional rewards they receive from doing so”, especially when they receive “positive emotional impacts from their viewing” (p. 340). In terms of the emotional needs, it is usually contended by researchers that the viewer’s emotional reactions are associated with their “affiliations” or identification with the competing teams (p. 341). Emotional needs also include the entertainment, eustress, self-esteem, and escape, which are similar to the motives of fan motivations aforementioned. For cognitive needs, one of the components is learning motivation, which is found among individuals who want to be more knowledgeable in sports information. By obtaining useful sport information via media, a person could participate in related discussions with friends and strangers resulting in a better chance to socialize with people (Melnick, 1993). Further, aesthetic is another cognitive motivation which is found among people who are attracted to the aesthetic qualities of the competition (Krohn, et al., 1998; Smith, 1988; Wann, 1995; Wann, et al., 1999, 2001; Wann & Wilson, 1999). Regarding the behavioral and social motives for consuming sports via media, many researchers proposed that viewers expected an emotional release from sports programming (Gantz, 1981; Gantz & Wenner, 1991). For instance, viewing sports on media provides fans with an opportunity to communicate with each other and cheer together (Raney, 2006).



Aside from the reasons of consuming sports on media, factors that affect different sport consumption have caused a wide interest among researchers. Armstrong (2002) found that “sociocultural factors such as degree of ethnic identification and psychosocial involvement with a culturally-laden sport experience significantly influenced Blacks' overall sport consumption patterns” (p. 309). Other studies have examined the difference in mediated sport consumption patterns between males and females (Andrew et al., 2009; James & Ridinger, 2002; Hardin & Greer, 2009; Lim, Martin & Kwak, 2010), between fans with different education level (Zhang, Pease, Hui, & Michaud, 1995), between various “demographic characteristics” (Snipes & Ingram, 2007), and “between fans of different sports” (Dwyer, Shapiro, Drayer, 2011, p.130). Dwyer et al. (2011) also suggested that all these findings can be used by marketers to identify differences in their target market and make marketing strategies accordingly. Moreover, prior studies have been examining the relationship between fan motivations and media consumption among fans (Andrew, Kim, O’Neal, Greenwell, James, 2009). Given the emergence of various media platforms such as social media for consuming sports recent years, the mediated sport consumer has become increasingly important for sport marketing and management (Dwyer, Shapiro, Drayer, 2011). With the increasing amount of merchandise purchased by mediated sport consumers, Pritchard and Funk (2006) summarized that “trends of escalating consumption via media continue to indicate attendance is becoming less central to an organization’s profitability” (p. 316). Despite the wide array of studies focused on consumers’ motivations to attend events or their motivations to be fans of various sports, Dwyer et al. (2011) suggested that the importance of media consumption

as an outcome of fan motivation and fandom has yet to be conducted (p.130). Besides, among all the studies on media sport consumption, cross-national research on media consumption behavior and motives are still limited (Kim, Andrew, Greenwell, 2009). Thus, this study will examine how media consumption, especially online consumption differ under different cultural contexts.

### **Social Media and Sports**

After discussing mediated sport consumption, it is worth mentioning how fans now consume sport in the digital world, specifically social media. Filo, Lock, Karg (2015) defined social media as “new media technologies facilitating interactivity and co-creation that allow for the development and sharing of user-generated content among and between organizations (e.g. teams, governing bodies, agencies and media groups) and individuals (e.g. consumers, athletes and journalists)” (p.167). However, Witkemper et al. (2012) claimed that social media “should not be classified as new media but as an independent phenomenon to be examined” (p.172). Social media has not been connected to sport until Williams and Chinn (2010) discussed sport marketing on social media. They also emphasized the value generated by social media when building a relationship with fans through interaction and communication. According to Sanderson (2011), “social media are inherently designed to facilitate human connections” (p. 494). To achieve effective connections with fans, sport organizations have the needs to adopt appropriate media platforms. Therefore, “social media is becoming an ideal tool for a continuing 2-way dialogue” (Abeza, O’Reilly, Reid, 2013, p. 120). With sport consumption via social media playing a critical role in sport marketing, it is of great significance to dive into the

mechanism of social media in the field of sport management (Witkemper, Lim, Waldburger, 2012).

In general, most sport-specific studies that have been conducted thus far have focused on how athletes (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Pegoraro, 2010) and organizations (Sanderson, 2011; Wallace et al., 2011) use social-media platforms. Social media has many different forms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest. Social media means different things to different people (McNary & Hardin, 2013). From an evolutionary perspective, research on social media has gone through a stage of examining the nature of social media to a stage of considering social media as a communication and marketing tool (Abeza, O'Reilly, Seguin, 2015). The role that social media plays in the marketing mix is very distinctive from traditional media, not only because social media has enhanced the interactivity and engagement with the audience, but also because it empowers fans with more opportunities to communicate with teams in the sports (Sanderson, 2011). From marketing's perspective, social media enables companies or organizations talk their audience, while it also offers audience or customers opportunities to "talk directly to one another" (Mangold, Faulds, 2009). Similarly, for sport departments, social media provides them with an effective point of engagement with their fans, thus it's of great importance to understand social media audience for sport marketing (Clavio, Walsh, 2013).

Currently, studies about social media and sport can be divided into three categories: strategic, operational, and user-focused (Filo, Lock, Karg, 2015). Specifically,

strategic research focuses on the functional qualities of social media from a group or team's perspective. On the contrary, operational use of social media refers to how a team or group uses social media in implementing strategies. Lastly, in the user-focused literature, scholars analyze the sport fan's motivation, perceptions, and preference regarding social media use (Filo, Lock, Karg, 2015).

The user-focused category includes an examination of fan's motivations, perceptions, and preference with regard to social media usage. Researchers have examined how followers use social media to gratify their own needs (Chen, 2011), and found that "people who seek out Twitter most actively would gratify a need to connect with others on Twitter to a greater extent than other users, mediated by use of Twitter functions, while controlling for demographic variables" (p.755). Similarly, prior research also proved that interactivity and information gathering are two major reasons that fans consume sports via social media (Kaye, 2010; Frederick, Clavio, Burch, & Zimmerman, 2012). However, though social media is a good way to interact with fans and release news about teams and individual players, fans may not always hold a positive attitude toward the organizations using social media (Sanderson, 2011). Furthermore, sport organizations can face several challenges caused by using social media, such as "the lack of control, concerns with credibility, concerns over effectiveness, difficulties identifying true customers and the allocation of organizational resources" (Filo, Lock, Karg, 2015, p. 167). Also, the social media policy development within organizations adds another potential challenge for using social media (Sanderson, 2011).

Despite the burgeoning interest in social media, little research has examined the area in a cross-national manner, leading a lack of information on how fans use social media engage with their favorite team and athletes in different countries (Shin, 2010). Goodrich (2013) examined the international differences in consumer usage of social media and how it influences consumers' decision-making processes. The results suggested that culture plays a significant role in affecting consumer's online purchase and complaint behavior. Therefore, it is assumed to be necessary to explore the culture differences in affecting social media usage. Furthermore, with respect to social media and sport fandom, many studies have been focused on using social media to gain new followers, and build relationship with fans, little is known about "how participation in social media activities affects team awareness, affiliation, and revenues" (Heiser, Chinn, 2012, p. 295). Heiser and Chinn (2012) found that almost all the sport organizations have been using social media to build team identification and there is a positive relationship between consumption of social media and team identification. However, they did not explore the relationship between social media consumption and team identification under different cultural settings. To partially fill this void, this study is going to analyze the interaction between social media and sport fandom under two different cultural environments.

### **Study NBA Fandom in Multiple Cultural Sites**

In sport management and marketing, Thomas and Dyall (1999) argued that "styles and patterns of sport involvement vary across cultures, sometimes requiring that associated rules, rituals, and ceremonies be modified or adapted to fit particular cultural

settings” (p. 115). By analyzing an example of sport consumption in New Zealand, they suggested the same sport could be treated differently under different cultures. Thus, it is important for sport managers to adjust the sporting strategies to reflect cultural differences. However, culture has been less explored in the sport management field than it is in other business areas (Thomas & Dyll, 1999). Despite a few studies about sport consumption in different cultural settings, such as Yu-Lin’s (2002) on the impact of personal values on sport consumption preferences and sport consumption behavioral frequency between American and Taiwanese students, and Xin’s (2008) study about sport fanship meaning and structures across two national cultures, few efforts have been devoted to examining how fans act differently in a cross-cultural manner. For this study, not only the influence of cultural difference on sport consumption will be evaluated, but also the relationship between sport consumption and fandom as well as levels of team identification will be provided.

Among all the existing cross-national studies about sport fandom, demographics analysis, and the relationship between fan behaviors, fandom, and team identification were explored among participants (Parry, Jones, Wann, 2014; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008; Melnick, Wann, 2010). In such studies, the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (Wann, 2002) and Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993) were widely used. For example, Wann et al. (2014) conducted a research about fandom in the United Kingdom revealing that gender difference is significantly correlated with fan behavior, fandom and team identification. Similar results were also found in the Australia, Greek and Norwegian samples (Melnick, Wann, 2010). Despite all the studies regarding sport

fandom in different nations, this type of research has not been conducted in China, as a world economic power. To partially fill this void, this current study will investigate sport fandom in China, including a comparison analysis between the U.S. and Chinese samples.

China, the most populous country on earth, has grown up to an international sporting market (Hong, 2008; Tan, 2008; Tan & Green, 2008). China has also become a major overseas market for the National Basketball Association since the establishment of its first office in Hong Kong in 1992 (Luo, Dai & Huang, 2015). In terms of the NBA games, the NBA has utilized its “strong network of television and digital media outlets” to cultivate “a developed sports show market in China” (p.1321). The NBA has been growing with the rise of many Chinese basketball players, such as Yao Ming, whose advent to the NBA “quickly brought about a phenomenal impact, both economically and culturally” (Wang, 2006, p.263). Despite a large sporting market in China, only a few studies have been focused on exploring the national differences in fandom. A study conducted by Kaplan and Landon (2012) examined general sport fandom in both China and the U.S. This study also revealed that many Chinese fans “tended to follow individual athletes rather than teams and have relatively low fan identity but high levels of fan motivation” (p.2). They found that country as an independent variable is a significant predictor of fan motives where “aesthetics and affiliation” are two major motives among Chinese fans (Kaplan, Landon, 2012, p.3). While this study helped scholars understand the fan base in China to some extent, it leaves fandom for a specific sport unexplored. Thus, this study will focus on researching fandom using the NBA as an example. In doing so, this study will contribute more detailed findings to sport fandom

scholarly literature while also providing implications that could be utilized by NBA sport management and other international sports organizations as they continue to target Chinese market.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

This study proposes that cultural difference will affect fan's level of identification, and the underlying motives for that identification. This study also seeks to explore the impact of social media on sport fandom. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

**H1:** There is a positive correlation between people's social media use of sport and sport fandom.

**H2:** There is a positive correlation between people's social media use of sport and level of team identification.

Due to the lack of past research of this type on fans in China, establishing specific hypotheses about the difference between fandom in the two nations was not appropriate (similar to the work by Melnick & Wann, 2004; Theodorakis & Wann, 2008). Rather, the current study attempted to examine sport consumption in two countries and the relationship between demographic variables, such as gender difference, age, GPA, work hours and sport fandom, team identification. Three research questions are answered by a comparison analysis between the Chinese and the U.S. sample.

**RQ 1a:** Does NBA fandom differ in two different nations?

**RQ 1b:** How strongly do participants identify themselves with their favorite NBA team across the two countries?



**RQ 2:** How are participants motivated differently for sport consumption across the two countries?

**RQ 3:** How do participants consume sport on social media differently across the two countries?

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

Participants were a convenience sample of 186 American college students from the University of Texas at Austin in the United States, and 174 Chinese college students from an Eastern University in China. For the sample of American students, the gender breakdown was 79 males (42.5%) and 107 females (57.5%), and the age ranged from 18 to 31 years, with an average age of 22.01 ( $SD = 2.75$ ). For the sample of Chinese students, the gender breakdown was 44 males (25.3%) and 130 females (74.7%), and the age ranged from 18 to 30 years, with the mean age of 22.31 ( $SD = 2.79$ ). The cover letter used for participant recruitment is included in Appendix A.

### **Research Design and Sampling Method**

This study was designed to investigate NBA sport fandom in two different nations, e.g. China and the United States. It was a quantitative study, non-experimental design, which surveys were used for data collection purposes. For this study, a purposive convenience sampling method was adopted. In order to access a number of participants that would satisfy the analyses of this study, the sample includes an acceptable representation of two groups (American college students and Chinese college students).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

After obtaining the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, participants from China and America were recruited to fill out an online survey in Chinese and English respectively. Specifically, in the U.S., an online survey tool, Qualtrics, was used for data collection, and a similar Chinese survey tool was used for Chinese participants. The

questionnaire in China is identical to the questionnaire utilized in the U.S; however, it was translated into Chinese. The participants were informed that the current study is being conducted in order to assess variables contributing to an individual's sport fandom and that their participation was strictly voluntary. The complete questionnaire that was distributed for this study is included in Appendix B.

## **Measures**

There are five parts of questions related to this study. The first section included questions related to fan behavior such as mediated sport consumption, which measured how participants consume sport-related information on traditional and social media. An example item is "how often do you follow sports games or box scores using the following media". Participants responded to 3 items with a five-point scale from "never" to "always". The rest 9 items are about specifically about to measure participants' social media usages. A sample item is "how often do you use social media to check the most up to date and breaking news in the world of NBA". Participants were required to respond with a five-point scale from "never" to "always".

The second section includes the Sport Fandom Questionnaire (SFQ; Wann, 2002), which is a five-item measure of sport fandom. "The SFQ is a reliable and unidimensional scale assessing degree of identification with the role of sport fan, and has been used successfully in multiple cultures and languages" (Wann, 2010). Participants responded to items with an eight-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree). This questionnaire is customized by using NBA as the team. An example item is, "Being a NBA fan is very important to me." Higher ratings for items, and the higher the

overall total scores for the given items, indicates a higher level of sport fandom. The SFQ has an internal consistency of  $\alpha = .96$  (Wann, 2002).

The third section of the survey is Wann's Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS; Wann & Branscombe, 1993), which is a six-item measure of identification with a given team. For the purposes of this study, participants were asked to think of their "favorite NBA team." when answering each question. Participants answered each item with an eight-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (not at all a fan) to 8 (very much a fan). An example item is "how strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of your favorite NBA team?" Higher ratings for each item, and the higher the overall total scores for the six items. The SSIS has an internal consistency of  $\alpha = .91$  (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the current study was .98.

The fourth section included a Fan Motivation Scale (FMS) based on a previous study (Al-Thibiti, 2004). It is a 22-item measure of fan motivation with a given team. It measures 6 motives (3 items for the social motive, 5 items for the escape motive, 3 items for the psychological motive, 4 items for the aesthetic motive, 5 items for the amotivation motive, 2 items for the sport atmosphere motive). Participants responded with a 5-point Likert-type scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The social motive measures how strongly people watch or attend sport games because they want to spend quality time with their families or friends (Wann, 1995). Three items were used to measure this motive in this study (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ). An example item is "one of my reasons to watch and attend sport games is to spend quality time with my friends and family".

The escape motive assesses the extent to which people consume sport because they want to get away from the boredom or stress of daily life (Stavros et al., 2014). Five items were used to measure this motive in this study (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ). An example item is "one of my reasons to avoid the hustle and the bustle of daily activities".

The entertainment motive measures how strongly people watch or attend sport games because they want to get "positive stress and psychological arousal" (Smith & Stewart, 2007, p. 158). Three items were used to measure this motive in this study (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). An example item is "one of my reasons to watch and attend sport games is to spend quality time with my friends and family".

The aesthetic motive measures the extent to which people watch or attend sport games because they simply just enjoy the aesthetic appeal of sporting endeavors (Slogan, 1989). Four items were used to measure this motive in this study (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ). An example item is "one of my reasons to watch and attend sport games is the beauty and grace of the game".

The boredom avoidance motive is also called amotivation, which means people watch or attend sport games because they just want to kill time and do not have anything else to do (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Five items were used to measure this motive in this study (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .79$ ). An example item is "one of my reasons to watch and attend sport games is because I am bored of other things in life".

The psychological motive was named sport atmosphere in this research. It measures how strongly people watch or attend sport games because they want to enjoy the environment (Al-Thibiti, 2004). Two items were used to measure this motive in this

study (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .73$ ). An example item is "one of my reasons to watch and attend sport games is to be in a friendly environment of the games".

In this survey, participants were asked to respond the item along with a five-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). An example item is "One of my reasons to watch and attend sport games is to spend quality time with my friends and family". The average score for each motive was computed and the over-all mean score indicate the level of fan motivation with 5 as the highest and 1 as the lowest.

The last section obtains participant's demographic information. Participants finished a demographic questionnaire that includes information about their age, gender, ethnicity, education level, free time, work hours, and the participants' parents' household income.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In the present research, data and results concerning the above hypotheses and research questions are obtained from a Chinese sample (study 1) and those from a U.S. sample (study 2). In the final section, results are compared and possible explanations for cultural differences are provided.

### **Demographic Profile: U.S. Sample**

**Initial analyses.** Scores from each of the measurements were computed to create an average score. The 5 items from the SFQ (Cronbach's Alpha = .96) were averaged into a single measure of sport fandom ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ). There were 6 items from the SSIS that were averaged to create a single index of identification (Cronbach's Alpha = .98) for the favored NBA team ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 2.34$ ). There 22 items from FMS were categorized into 6 subscales, including the quality of the game, escape, boredom avoidance, social, entertainment, sport atmosphere. Then the 6 subscales were computed to create an average FMS score ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = .81$ ). The internal consistency estimates showed an alpha level of .90 for the overall FMS. The alpha levels for the subscales were .93 for the quality of the game, .87 for the escape, .79 for the boredom avoidance, .82 for the social, .88 for the entertainment, and .73 for the sport atmosphere.

Cronbach's alpha was not used to measure reliability for the two and three-item scales measuring traits. Statistical analysis research argues that alpha levels for 2-item scales often do not meet a commonly accepted .70 alpha reliability score, and suggest inter-item correlations as being better suited for assessing reliability (Peterson, 1994). In

this study, the criteria of Cronbach’s alpha for establishing the internal consistency reliability was used according to previous studies (Kline, 2000; George & Mallery, 2003). Specially, the criteria says that “excellent ( $\alpha > 0.9$ ), good ( $0.7 < \alpha < 0.9$ ), acceptable ( $0.6 < \alpha < 0.7$ ), poor ( $0.5 < \alpha < 0.6$ ), unacceptable ( $\alpha < 0.5$ )” (Bhatnagar et al., 2014). According to this study, a 2-item scale for social media consumption was combined to calculate an average score. These two items are “How often do you follow sports games or box scores using social media”, and “How often do you use social media to check the most up to date and breaking news in the world of NBA”. The internal consistency estimates showed an alpha level of .68 for the two items, thus it’s acceptable to combine them.

The following tables compared the mean scores of SFQ and SSIS for all the participants in the U.S. based on gender, age, education level, work hours, free time, and the GPA.

**Table 1**

*The Differences in Team Identification, Sport Fandom By Gender (t-test)*

<i>U.S Sample</i>	Group						95% CI for		
	Male			Female			Mean		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	Difference	t	df
Sport Fandom	4.45	1.88	79	2.77	1.74	107	1.16, 2.21	6.30**	184
Team Identification	4.90	2.36	79	2.87	2.11	107	1.38, 2.67	6.16**	184

*Notes: \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed), \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).*



An independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to examine the difference between males and female in sport fandom and team identification. The results show that there is a significant difference in sport fandom between males ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ,  $n = 79$ ) and females ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ,  $n = 107$ ),  $t = 6.30$ ,  $df = 184$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI for mean difference 1.16 to 2.21. On average males tend to have higher levels of sport fandom than females. Similarly, for the SISS, males ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = 2.36$ ) also had significantly higher levels of team identification than females ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ),  $t = 6.16$ ,  $df = 184$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI for mean difference 1.38 to 2.67 (Table 1).

**Table 2**

*Pearson correlation coefficients in SSIS, SFQ by Age, GPA, Free Time, Work Hours, Education*

<i>U.S Sample</i>	Age	GPA	Free Time	Work Hours	Education
Sport Fandom	-.37**	.08	.05	-.22**	-.45**
Team Identification	-.26**	.10	.06	-.11	-.36**

*Notes: \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed), \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).*

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the correlations between sport fandom, team identification, and participants' demographics, such as age, work hours, free time, GPA, and education level. First, as shown in Table 2, the results indicated that there is a significant negative relationship between age and sport fandom ( $r = -.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Besides, age is also found significantly correlated with team identification ( $r = -.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Second, GPA and people's daily free time were not significantly correlated with both sport fandom and team identification. With respect to

work hours, no significant correlations emerged between team identification level and work time. However, there is a weak negative relationship between sport fandom and work hours ( $r = -.22, p < .01$ ). Finally, the outcome also shows that there are significant negative correlations between education level and sport fandom ( $r = -.45, p < .01$ ). Among all the college students, their education level is negatively related to their level of team identification (Table 2).

**Hypothesis 1.** The first hypothesis predicted a positive association between people's social media use for sport purpose and sport fandom. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether there is a relationship between sport consumption via social media and sport fandom. The results revealed a significant and positive relationship ( $r = .79, N = 186, p < .01$ ). The correlation was strong in strength. Higher level of sport fandom was associated with higher frequency in using social media for NBA purpose in the U.S. study (see Table 3).

**Hypothesis 2.** The second hypothesis predicted a positive association between people's social media use for sport purpose and team identification. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether there is a relationship between social media usage and team identification. The results revealed a significant and positive relationship ( $r = .75, N = 186, p < .01$ ). The correlation was medium in strength. Higher level of team identification was associated with higher frequency in using sport consumption on social media in the U.S. sample (see Table 3).

**Table 3***Pearson correlation coefficients in the United States study*

<i>U.S. Sample</i>		Sport Consumption On Social Media	Sport Fandom	Team Identification
Sport Consumption On Social Media	Pearson Correlation	1	.789**	.750**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	186	186	186
Sport Fandom	Pearson Correlation	.789**	1	.883**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	186	186	186
Team Identification	Pearson Correlation	.750**	.883**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	186	186	186

*Notes: \*\*significant at  $p < .01$ .***Demographic Profile: Chinese Sample**

**Initial analyses.** Similar to the preliminary analyses for the U.S sample, scores from each of the measurements were computed to create an average score. The 5 items from the SFQ (*Cronbach's Alpha* = .98) were averaged into a single measure of sport fandom ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 2.61$ ). The 6 items from the SSIS that were averaged to create a single index of identification (SSIS, *Cronbach's Alpha* = .97) for the favored NBA team ( $M = 4.0$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ ). There 22 items from FMS were categorized into 6 subscales, including the quality of the game, escape, boredom avoidance, social, entertainment, sport atmosphere. Then the 6 subscales were computed to create an average FMS score ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = .84$ ). The internal consistency estimates showed an alpha level of .96 for the overall FMS. The alpha level for the subscales were .93 for the quality of the

game, .83 for the escape, .83 for the boredom avoidance, .85 for the social, .85 for the entertainment, and .81 for the sport atmosphere. A 2-item scale indicating sport consumption on social media for NBA purpose was calculated by averaging two items, “how often do you follow sports games or box scores using social media”, and “how often do you use social media to check the most up to date and breaking news in the world of NBA”. The internal consistency estimates showed an alpha level of .78 for the two items, thus it is acceptable to combine them.

The following tables compared the mean scores of team identification and sport fandom for all the participants in the Chinese sample based on gender, age, level of education, work hours, free time, and the GPA.

**Table 4**

*The Differences in Sport Fandom, Team Identification by Gender (t-test)*

<i>Chinese Sample</i>	Group						95% CI for		
	Male			Female			Mean		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	Difference	t	df
Sport Fandom	2.29	1.52	44	4.97	2.57	130	-3.49, -1.87	-6.54**	172
Team Identification	2.34	1.50	44	4.55	2.17	130	-2.80, -1.63	-6.27**	172

*Notes: \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed), \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).*

An independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to examine the difference between males and female in sport fandom and team identification. The results show that there is a significant difference in sport fandom between males ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ,  $n =$

44) and females ( $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 2.57$ ,  $n = 130$ ),  $t = -6.54$ ,  $df = 172$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI for mean difference -3.49 to -1.87. On average, females tend to have higher levels of sport fandom than males. Besides, with respect to the team identification, females ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ ,  $n=130$ ) also had significantly higher levels of team identification than males ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ,  $n = 44$ ),  $t = -6.27$ ,  $df = 130$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI for mean difference -2.80 to -1.63 (Table 4).

**Table 5**

*Pearson correlation coefficients in SSIS, SFQ by Age, GPA, Free Time, Work Hours, Education*

<i>Chinese Sample</i>	Age	GPA	Free Time	Work Hours	Education
Sport Fandom	.16*	.05	.11	.01	.11
Team Identification	.11	.06	.11	.01	.09

*Notes: \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed), \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).*

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the differences between sport fandom, team identification, and participants' demographics, including age, free time, work hours, education, and the GPA. As shown in Table 5, the results indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between age and SFQ ( $r = .16$ ,  $N = 174$ ,  $p < .05$ ). No significant associations between age and SSIS ( $r = .11$ ,  $N = 174$ ,  $p > .05$ ) emerged from the analysis. No significant correlations were found between participants' fandom or team identification and age, free time, work hours, education, and the GPA.

**Hypothesis 1.** The first hypothesis predicted a positive association between people's social media use for sport purpose and sport fandom. A Pearson correlation

analysis was conducted to examine whether there is a relationship between social media usage and sport fandom. The results revealed a significant and positive relationship ( $r = .70$ ,  $N = 174$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The correlation was strong in strength. People who are highly identified with the role of NBA fan turned to be more likely to consume sports on social media (see Table 6).

**Hypothesis 2.** The second hypothesis predicted a positive association between people's social media use for sport purpose and team identification. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether there is a relationship between social media usage and team identification. The results revealed a significant and positive relationship ( $r = .67$ ,  $N = 174$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The two variables were strongly related (Table 6).

**Table 6***Pearson correlation coefficients in the Chinese study*

		Sport Consumption	Team	
<i>Chinese Sample</i>		On Social Media	Sport Fandom	Identification
Sport Consumption	Pearson	1	.701**	.665**
On Social Media	Correlation			
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	174	174	174
Sport Fandom	Pearson	.701**	1	.903
	Correlation			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	174	174	174
Team Identification	Pearson	.665**	.903**	1
	Correlation			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	174	174	174

*Notes: correlation is significant at the 0.05 level***Comparison of Chinese to the U.S. Sample**

After the initial analyses with Chinese and the U.S sample respectively by exploring the differences in sport fandom, team identification based on gender, age, level of education, work hours, free time, and the GPA, and testing the two hypotheses, a

comparison analysis was provided as following to answer the rest three research questions.

**Research Question 1a.** The first research question asked whether the level of sport fandom for NBA will differ in different cultural environment. An independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to examine the difference between these two countries. The results showed a significant difference in sport fandom scores among participants in these two countries,  $t = -3.30$ ,  $df = 358$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI for mean difference -1.29 to -3.26 (Table 7). As shown in Table 7, Chinese fans ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ) have a mean score higher than those of America ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ).

**Research Question 1b.** The second question asked whether the level of team identification for NBA will differ in different cultural environment. An independent samples t-test analysis was conducted to examine the difference between these two countries. The results didn't show a significant difference in team identification scores among participants in these two countries,  $t = -1.04$ ,  $df = 358$ ,  $p > .01$  (Table 7).

**Table 7**

*Means and Standard Deviations for Sport Fandom and Team Identification*

<i>Combined Sample</i>	Group						95% CI for		
	U.S.			China			Mean		
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	Difference	t	df
Sport Fandom	3.48	1.98	186	4.29	2.62	174	-1.29, -3.26	-3.30**	358
Team Identification	3.74	2.43	186	3.99	2.24	174	-.74, .23	-1.04	358

*Notes: \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed), \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).*



**Research Question 2.** The third research question asked how fans in these two nations are motivated differently for sport consumption. According to Table 8, significant differences (all  $p < .01$ ) were found between American and Chinese participants in terms of four fan motives, including escape, boredom avoidance, entertainment, and social. In particular, for Chinese fans, they are more motivated to watch sport because of the boredom avoidance and escape motives. On the contrary, for American fans, they seek for entertainment and social needs when are watching or attending sport games.

**Table 8**

*Means and Standard Deviations for different motives of sport consumption in China and the U.S.*

	<i>U.S.</i>		<i>Chinese</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Significance</i>
The Quality of the Game	3.46	1.25	3.57	1.03	.34
Escape	3.04	1.03	3.24	0.83	.04*
Boredom Avoidance	2.65	0.84	3.12	0.83	.00**
Social	3.71	0.92	3.39	0.94	.00**
Entertainment	4	0.98	3.51	0.94	.00**
Sport Atmosphere	3.41	1.07	3.51	1.01	0.39

*Notes: \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed), \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).*

**Research Question 3.** The fourth research question asked how participants consume sport on media differently across the two countries. As shown in Table 9, the test of association results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in

people's sport consumption between participants from China and America,  $\chi^2 (2, N = 360) = 74.90, p < .01$ . Participants from the United States prefer to use TV as their primary source for sport games, while 63% of participants in China used internet for sport game consumption.

As shown in Table 10, the test of association results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between participants from China and America in terms of their social following of NBA players,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 360) = 10.51, p < .01$ . Participants from China tend to have high rate of following NBA players on social media that those from the United States. However, no significant difference found with respect to their social following of NBA teams.

**Table 9**

*Results of Chi-square Test and Descriptive Statistics for sport consumption by Country*

<i>Primary Source for Sport Games</i>	<i>U.S.</i>	<i>China</i>	$\chi^2$
None	11 (5.9%)	21 (65.6%)	74.90**
TV	94 (86.2%)	15 (13.8%)	
Internet	81 (37%)	138 (63%)	

Notes: \*\* $p < .01$ ,  $df = 2$ . Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages.

**Table 10***Results of Chi-square Test and Descriptive Statistics for Social Following of NBA**Players by Country*

<i>NBA Players Social Following</i>	<i>U.S.</i>	<i>China</i>	$\chi^2$
Yes	73 (42.7%)	98 (57.3%)	10.51**
No	113 (59.8%)	76 (40.2%)	

*Notes: \*\* $p < .01$ ,  $df = 1$ . Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages.*

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **Summary of Results**

In the U.S study, a gender difference was found in the sample in terms of sport fandom, fan motivations, and team identification. In particular, males are more identified with their favorite NBA team than females. Second, males reported higher levels of fandom with the NBA organization than those of females. However, in China, the situation was reversed. A significant difference was also found between males and females regarding sport fandom and team identification. This is very different from previous findings in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, and Australia (Parry, Jones, Wann, 2014) where males usually reported higher scores of fandom and team identification.

Moreover, in the U.S study, age and education play critical roles in differentiating fan's motivation scores and team identification level. The results showed that the older the fans are, the less likely they are motivated to watch or attend NBA sport games or identified with their favorite teams. There were no such situations found in the Chinese sample, but it is interesting to note that age is positively related to the fandom level among all the participants from China.

Furthermore, in this study, it was assumed that there is a positive association between fan behavior (e.g. sport consumption on social media) and sport fandom, team identification. Through Pearson correlation analysis for the two samples, the outcome revealed that participants who have higher levels of fandom and team identification are more likely to use social media to get NBA news on social media.

It is interesting to find that, overall, Chinese fans demonstrate higher scores of NBA fandom than American fans. Furthermore, this study also found that fans are motivated differently in China and America. In particular, Chinese and American participants differ in four motives, escape, boredom avoidance, social and entertainment. Chinese fans are more likely to consume sports because of the escape and boredom avoidance motives. On the other hand, American fans are more likely to seek for social and entertainment needs for watching and attending sport events.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The gender difference found from the U.S. study to some extent reinforces the findings of Wann, Parry, Jones (2014), who found fandom was male dominated in many countries such as Norway and Greek. Besides, in terms of team identification, this study is in agreement with previous findings that “team identification is a strong predictor of sport fan consumption” (Fink, Trail, Anderson, 2002, p. 195).

In regards to mediated sport consumption, it is worth noticing that college students in China primarily choose internet as their source for sport games, while American fans prefer TV. Moreover, the results further demonstrated that social media has been significantly changing the ways that fans connect with their favorite teams. As Crawford (2004) claimed that mediated sport consumption is now a dominated way of consuming sports among fans, and social media is playing an increasingly important role in developing fandom and connecting fans with teams. Analyses of this study to some degree confirmed Kaplan and Landon’s (2012) research in examining sport fandom in China and the U.S. As they suggested, Chinese fans tended to follow individual players

rather than teams. In this study, a significant difference was found in NBA social following among participants from the two nations. Chinese fans reported a higher rate of following NBA players than American fans. However, different from what Kaplan and Landon suggested that fans in China have relatively low fan identity, this study found that fandom scores among Chinese fans were actually higher than those of American for NBA. This is worth noticing since the NBA was originally from America and has only entered the Chinese market for a few years.

### **Practical Implications**

Based on the findings from this study, sport marketers can make some marketing strategies accordingly when expanding to the Chinese market. For example, it would be very beneficial to fully utilize social media to engage and build a positive relationship with fans in China. Besides, instead of promoting teams as a whole, it would be more effective to ask players to communicate with their fans via social media or other platforms.

In terms of the formation of messaging and advertising strategies in both the United States and China, sports marketers should attend to what motivates fandom in the two countries. Results showed that Chinese fans choose to watch or attend sport games because they want to avoid boredom, whereas fans in the United States use sport as a way to socialize with people or purely entertain themselves. This information can aid in the creation of creative concepts in advertising using sport and social media to potentially cultivate a wide range of fan base in China for sport organizations.

## **Limitations**

Finally, several limitations of the current study warrant mention. First, as with other previous studies (Wann et al., 2001, Parry et al., 2014), college students were selected as participants for this study, resulting in a homogeneous sample in regard to age, and experience. Only 360 students from both of the nations participated in this study. It is possible that a large sample might demonstrate different results. Another limitation would be the gender distribution in this study, the number of females and males is not equal in both the Chinese and American samples. Furthermore, all the responses were based on the participants' self-reporting data, which requires honesty and cooperation in answering the questions. Finally, in term of the fan motives, this study did not examine factors such as gender and age in differentiating the "motives-identification relationship" (Fink, et al., 2002, p. 195).

## **Directions for Future Research**

For future investigations, other fan behaviors such as sport attendance, sport product purchase, could be added to the current work. In particular, this study only focused on mediated sport consumption, especially social media sport consumption. To further understand the relationship between team identification and sport consumptions, more research are called for into this area. It would also be interesting to explore how players or teams communicate with fans on Chinese social media platforms.

With respect to cross-cultural research, fans of both national groups converged on their fan behavior on social media. However, statistical analysis indicated a number of differences in motivations among fans from China and America. Future investigations

can also dive deep into explaining the difference among fans from these two nations. For example, the history of sport in China could be one of the potential reasons that affect fans' motivations and fandom. This study also proved that team players caught more attention on Chinese social media compared to teams. It would be beneficial to understand the interacting mechanism between players and fans for marketing recommendations if more research can be devoted to this field.

## **Conclusions**

The data demonstrated both similarities and differences across the Chinese and U.S. cultures. In the U.S. study, results revealed gender differences in fandom, team identification. Other demographic factors such as age and education can also differentiate fans levels of fandom and team identification. In the Chinese sample, females demonstrated higher scores in both fandom and team identification. In both of the two nations, team identification and fandom play significant roles in predicting fan's behavior (e.g. sport consumption on social media). The Chinese fans reported higher fandom scores for NBA compared to American fans. Analyses also indicated that Chinese fans were more likely to follow individual NBA players on social media than American participants. Regarding fan motivations, Chinese fans tended to seek for boredom avoidance and escape when watching or attend sport games, while American fans claimed that social and entertainment as their primary motives.



**Appendix A**  
**The Cover Letter**

**Dear Students:**

My name is Yahui Zhang and I am an Advertising master student at the University of Texas at Austin. By answering this questionnaire you will help me realizing my final thesis. This survey aims at understanding sport fandom and social media. Please read each question or statement carefully and try to answer all questions honestly and to your best knowledge. It takes on average 10-15 minutes of your time. Your answers will be treated confidentially and only for this research. I greatly appreciate your help!

**Appendix B**  
Survey Questions

## Part 1 Mediated sport consuming

1. In general, how often do you follow sports games or box scores using the following media?

TV	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Quite Often	Very Often
Newspapers	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Quite Often	Very Often
Social Media	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Quite Often	Very Often
Radio	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Quite Often	Very Often

2. In general, what is your primary source for sports games?

None TV Newspapers Internet Radio

3. In general, what is your primary source for (Non-game) sports content ?

None TV Newspapers Internet Radio

4. Which forms of social media do you use? (Check all that apply)

Facebook

Twitter

YouTube

Fans Forums

LinkedIn

Instagram

Snapchat

5. How many hours a week do you spend on social media?

0 hours      1-4 hours      5-10 hours      11-15 hours      16+ hours

6. Do you use social media for sport purposes? E.g. keeping up to date with scores, following sports people on Facebook, Twitter, or Weibo? If so, to 7. If not, to 8

Yes      No

7. In what way do you use social media for sport purposes?

To check sport news

Look at live scores

Follow professional sports people

Interact with professional sports people

8. Do you follow the NBA team you support on any form of social media?

Yes      No

9. Do you follow any NBA players you support on any form of social media?

Yes      No

10. Do you believe the relationship between fans and professional athletes has changed since the emergence of social media?

Yes      No

11. How often do you use social media to check the most up to date and breaking news in the world of NBA?

Never      Rarely      Occasionally      Frequently      Always

12. Have you seen a crisis occur within your favorite NBA team or players due to a misuse in social media by either the players or the club itself?

Yes No

## Part 2 Sport fandom scale

STRONGLY DISAGREE

STRONGLY

AGREE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

1. I consider myself to be a NBA fan.
2. My friends see me as a NBA fan.
3. I believe that following NBA is the most enjoyable form of entertainment.
4. My life would be less enjoyable if I were not able to follow NBA.
5. Being a NBA fan is very important to me.

## Part 3 Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS)

1. How important to YOU is it that your favorite NBA team wins?

Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very important

2. How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of your favorite NBA team?

Not at all a fan 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very much a fan

3. How strongly do your FRIENDS see YOU as a fan of your favorite NBA team?

Not at all a fan 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very much a fan

4. During the season, how closely do you follow your favorite NBA team via ANY of the following: a) in person or on television, b) on the radio, c) television news or a newspaper, or d) the Internet?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Almost everyday

5. How important is being a fan of your favorite NBA team to YOU?

Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very important

6. How often do YOU display the NBA team's name or insignia at your place of work, where you live, or on your clothing?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Always

#### Part 4 Fan Motivation Scale

Instructions: The following are reasons that can drive individuals to watch and attend sports games. By "sports games", we mean competitive between sport teams at the college or the professional level in any type of sport. Please read each statement, and then choose your answer. Responses range from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Responses are confidential.

#### One Of My Reasons To Watch And Attend Sport Games is...

	Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree
1. to spend quality time with my friends and family	
2. to seek excitement and stimulation.	
3. to get away from my everyday routine.	

4. to increase my self-esteem.	
5. to occupy my free time.	
6. to be in a friendly environment of the games.	
7. the beauty and grace of the game	
8. just to keep me busy or occupied.	
9. to be with other people.	
10. the opportunity to forget about my problems.	
11. because I care about sport games.	
12. because I am bored of other things in life.	
13. to interact with others.	
14. to have a good time.	
15. to avoid the hustle and the bustle of daily activities.	
16. to relax.	
17. the high level of skills shown by players or athletes.	
18. to make me feel good.	
19. to kill time.	
20. to be entertained.	
21. to relieve stress and tension.	
22. to use it as a form of recreations.	



## **Part 5 Demographics**

Directions: Please answer the following questions as accurate as possible. DO NOT include your name or any other identifying information.

1. My gender is

Female

Male

2. My age is\_\_\_\_\_

3. I am

African American

Asian

Caucasian

Hispanic

Native American

4. My level of education is

Freshmen

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Graduate student

Other

5. My work hours (after school work) per week are

None

20 hours or less

21-30 hours

31-40 hours

41 hours or more

6. How much free time do you have daily, after work or school?

None

1-2 hours

3-4 hours

5-6 hours

7 hours or more

7. My grade point average (GPA) is

3.75 or higher

2.75-3.74

1.75-2.74

1.74 or less

8. My parents' household income is about?

Under \$10,000

\$10,000 - \$19,999

\$20,000 - \$29,999

\$30,000 - \$39,999

\$40,000 - \$49,999

\$50,000 - \$74,999

\$75,000 - \$99,999

\$100,000 - \$150,000

Over \$150,000

Would rather not say

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